ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

Patients support camera phones in hospitals

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The use of camera phones by clinicians is discouraged in Australian hospitals, however a survey of Newcastle hand surgery patients found that the overwhelming majority of patients support the practice.

Dr Jill Tomlinson is presenting the findings of her research undertaken with Dr Bryce Meads and Dr Andrew Myers, at the Annual Scientific Congress of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in Perth today.

Dr Tomlinson says restricting the use of camera phone images has a detrimental impact on clinical communication between doctors in hospitals.

“Junior doctors regularly need to seek advice from more senior surgical staff or from doctors in another specialty, and this restriction places limitations on the quality and quantity of information that can be conveyed,” Dr Tomlinson said.

“Delays in the timeliness and quality of communication can impact decisions about transfer, treatment and hospital attendances.

“This is the case in many areas of medicine – not just in surgery.

“We undertook this research in 2012 after local area health district hospital guidelines were released stating that clinicians were not to take photographs of patients on personal cameras or mobile telephones. We felt it was important to find out what patients thought,” Dr Tomlinson said.

Three clinicians and 140 patients took part in the study, where patients were asked to complete a confidential two page survey.

The results showed that patients believe the use of mobile phones for clinical diagnosis may improve the accuracy of communication and should be used if the treating clinician feels it will help with diagnosis and management.

Patients also agreed to the use of photographs of images and x-rays of their hand condition for teaching purposes, and at weekly audit meetings of the surgical team at the public hospital where they were being treated.

“There are legal, ethical and practical concerns for clinicians who use camera phones to take images, and many of these have been outlined in the Australian Medical Association guide Clinical images and the use of personal mobile devices, which was released in November 2014,” Dr Tomlinson said.

“However this study shows that despite these concerns our patients support the use of camera phones in their clinical care, and for audit and teaching purposes.”

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